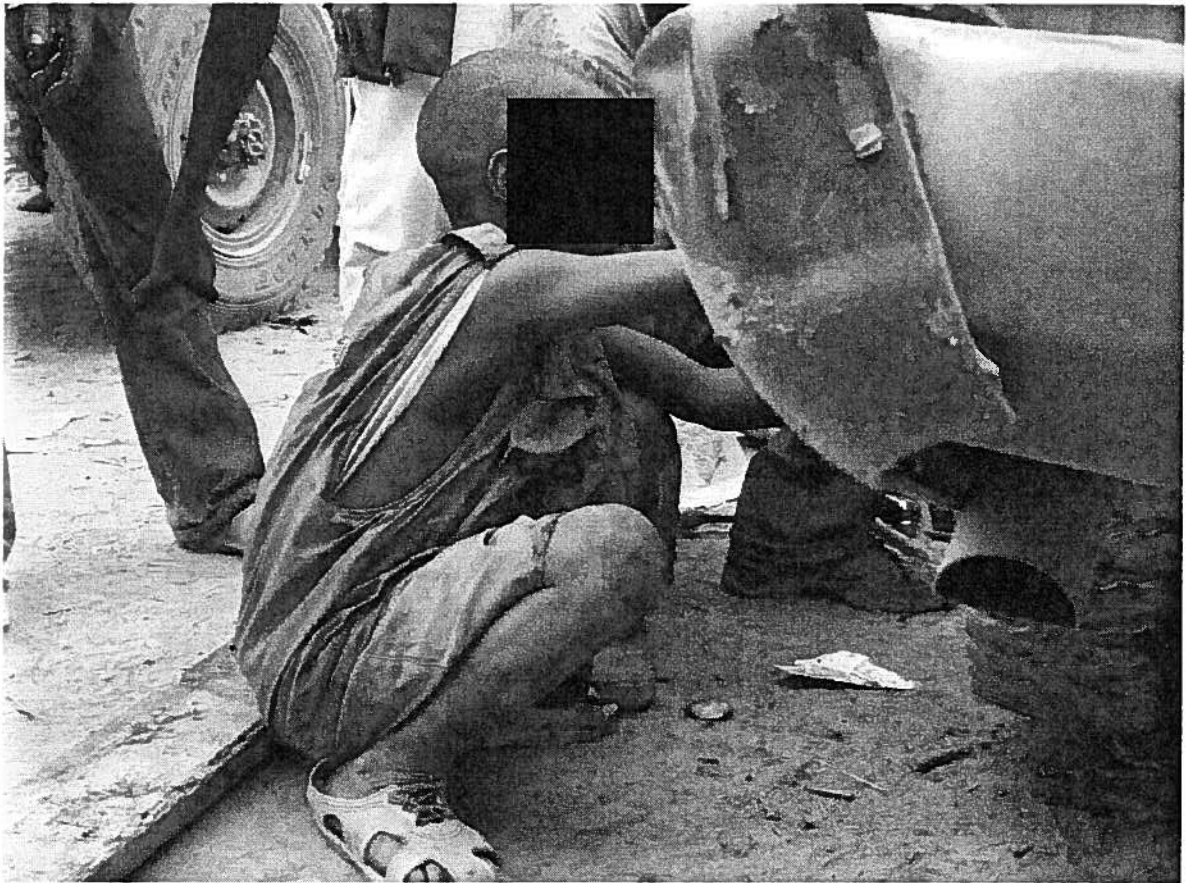# Child Labor and Education in Liberia:
Needs and Resource Assessment in Targeted Communities

Countering Youth and Child Labor through Education (CYCLE) Project

International Rescue Committee

Countering Youth and Child Labor through Education (CYCLE) project in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Photographs by [   ]

MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1933, the IRC is a global leader in emergency relief, rehabilitation, protection of human rights, post-conflict development, resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by conflict and oppression.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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List of Key Acronyms

ANPPCAN	African Network for the Protection and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
C.138	ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age of Work
C.182	ILO Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor
CAFF	Children Associated with Fighting Forces
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRCOPAC	CRC Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflict
CRCOPSC	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children
CYCLE	Countering Youth and Child Labor through Education
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IIECL	International Initiative to End Child Labor
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ILO	International Labor Organization
JSS	Junior Secondary School
OCAM	Organization for Children & Adolescent Mothers
SSS	Senior Secondary School

I. Executive Summary

More than a decade of war in Liberia destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, including education and health facilities, roads, electricity and water. The prolonged conflict devastated its economy and exposed children and youth to years of terror, abuse, insecurity, and loss of stability and family structures. According to the U.N.'s Human Development Report, Liberians have a life expectancy of only 41.5 years, and nearly half of the population over 15 is illiterate (45.2%).[1] With little to no opportunity for education and surrounded by desperate poverty, children in Liberia are vulnerable to exploitation. It is to ease these conditions that the U.S. Department of Labor has funded the IRC's Countering Youth and Child Labor through Education project (CYCLE).

The CYCLE project plans to move 30,000 children in Sierra Leone and Liberia who are employed in the worst forms of child labor or who are at risk of being employed in the worst forms of child labor[2] into educational programs. This document provides the results of the Needs and Resources Assessment conducted for the CYCLE project in Liberia in early 2006.

The prime objective of the needs and resource assessment was to gather information that would enrich the understanding of the needs in Liberia and help guide the CYCLE program in setting, designing, and implementing its education and other program strategies. The study results paint a picture of a country in crisis but also a place where children try very hard to get an education in the most difficult of circumstances. There are many encouraging findings, including the value that families say they place on education, the number of children who do attempt to go to school, and relatively decent number, condition, and distribution of school facilities in the communities studied. And yet, there is still much to be done to make education a reality and to help reduce child labor for Liberia's children.

Years of research and lessons learned from past programmatic experiences documented by the IRC, ILO, USDOL, and others have shown that no one strategy alone is effective in the elimination

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[1] See www.hdr.undp.org for more information. Liberia is not included in the U.N.'s Human Development Index.

[2] The "worst forms of child labor" (WCFL) is a term used by the International Labor Organization's Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor from 1999 to refer to: 1) all forms of slavery and practices similar to slavery, such as the sale or trafficking of children, forced or compulsory labor, and the use of children in armed conflict; 2) child sex work; 3) use of children for illicit activities, such as drug trafficking; and 4) work that is likely to harm the "health, safety or morals of children." (ILO C.182, Article 3, a-d.)

of the worst forms of child labor. A multidimensional approach that includes stimulating economic growth, using technology and labor-saving strategies, strengthening appropriate laws, ensuring effective implementation of minimum age of work and compulsory education, and promoting children's right not to work has made the greatest strides in sustaining longer-term success toward eliminating child labor.

In varying degrees, the multidimensional strategies are incorporated in the programmatic approach being used by the CYCLE program. CYCLE's purpose—to ensure that children engaged in or at risk of engaging in exploitative child labor in targeted communities are educated— requires multiple lines of actions that include prevention, withdrawal, and protection.

Methodology

Not designed to be a statistically significant sampling, the Assessment was meant to inform program design by developing an understanding of the needs of children and youth who are working in or are at risk of engaging in exploitative child labor[3] in CYCLE's target counties and the resources available or not available to them to meet these needs. Because Liberia is in the midst of post-conflict reconstruction, with large population movements and fluid communities due to returning refugees and internally displaced people, statistically significant data on such things as the prevalence of child labor would not be a useful baseline against which to measure the progress of the project. Overall, however, the Assessment gives a richer and fuller picture of the challenges faced by children, families, and schools in Liberia.

The Needs and Resources Assessment was conducted in Montserrado, Lofa, and Nimba counties and targeted the following populations[4]:

- children and youth, age 5 to 17, living in selected communities;

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[3] There is no universally accepted statistical definition for the term "worst forms of child labor." For the purpose of this report and in accordance with terminology used by the U.S. Department of Labor, we use the term "exploitative child labor" to refer to forms of work described in ILO Convention 182, Article 3, sections (a) through (d) when performed by a person under 18 years, and work that prevents persons under 15 years of age from attending and participating effectively in school. For more information, see ILO Convention No. 182, *Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999)*; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/ratification/convention/text.htm. See also ILO Convention No. 138, *Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973)*; available from http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp2.htm.

[4] The target areas studied were selected on the basis of prioritized locations identified by the CYCLE program staff and local partners, and then further refined based on the following three criteria: 1) suspected high presence of ex-combatants within the communities; 2) suspected high incidence of EXPLOITATIVE CHILD LABOR; and, 3) proximity to IRC operations that offered accessibility for CYCLE program implementation.

- parents, who have the power to influence the choices of their children with respect to education and work;
- teachers and school administrators; and others who are currently or potentially impacting the lives of children removed from or at-risk of engaging in exploitative child labor, i.e., community leaders, NGOs, community based organizations, faith based organizations, trade unions, employers, and other key individuals.

The study was cross-sectional and predominantly quantitative. However, qualitative approaches were also included to gain insight into the attitudes and practices of key target stakeholders. As part of the data collection process, primary and secondary data were collected at the national and local levels.

The quantitative phase of the assessment had three components:
- Household Survey;
- Child Education and Labor Survey; and
- School Assessment Survey.

The qualitative phase consisted of three components:
- Focus group discussions held with key stakeholders, including children, parents, teachers, and employers;
- Institutional Mapping to determine what other programs already exist to serve children in the target areas; and
- Situation analyses at the county/district and national levels, which included key informant interviews with governmental, non-governmental, and donor groups.

The scope of the Assessment included 10 town/villages and surrounding areas, including the town that was used to pilot the research instruments. Within this, 287 household surveys were conducted, 746 children and 125 teachers were surveyed, 75 focus group discussions were held, institutional mapping was performed with 9 groups of officials, and 126 schools and education programs (e.g. vocational education or literacy programs) were reviewed.

II. Main Findings

Below are the most important findings for the following four areas: A) National and Institutional Context Surrounding Child Labor and Education, B) Household Variables Affecting Child labor and Education, C) Children's Education and Work Status, and D) Assessment of the Education System and Infrastructure.

A. National and Institutional Context Surrounding Child Labor and Education

- Liberia has not ratified ILO C. 138 on Minimum Age of Work, nor has it updated its legal structure to incorporate its ratification of C. 182 and the Convention on the Rights of the Children.
- There is an apparent gap between the legal age of the end of compulsory education at 11 and the minimum age of work at 16, making such children especially vulnerable to exploitation.
- Since recent census data are not available in Liberia, many local leaders had conducted their own counts of local households and were able to point to areas of exploitative child labor in their communities, including sex workers, CAFF, drug dealers, and other illicit workers.
- Many community leaders indicated that large school fees negated the ideal of free primary education, and also discussed a number of other issues facing their communities, from lack of safe drinking water and food to the need for health care and employment, to the ongoing problems created by the war and ex-combatants.
- Enforcement of child labor laws and compulsory education laws was limited even before the war, and continues to be so today due to inadequate resources for these purposes.
- According to the Liberian government's response to the U.N. on its compliance with the CRC, $32.6 million, or 12 percent of the national Liberian budget, was being spent on education in 2004-2005, with increased amounts in the last year. This percentage is up significantly from past years, as in 1997, when education spending represented as little as 5.5 percent of the national budget.
- The availability of secondary schools is very limited, especially outside of urban areas. Likewise, the availability of vocational and accelerated or other non-traditional learning programs is limited to urban communities, such as Koidu and Waterloo. Even though vocational training was often mentioned in focus group discussions as a desirable option for youth, very few children in our sample had participated in such training. As the chart

below demonstrates, 69 percent of the youth surveyed expressed an interest in obtaining skills training.

Interest in Receiving Vocational/Skills Training

No 12%

Yes 88%
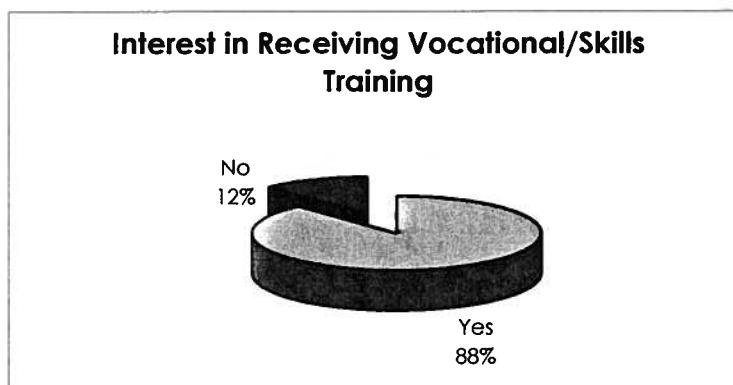
- Significant service gaps uniformly exist in the availability of programs to address the exploitative child labor and to monitor the situation of children within communities to ensure that their health, safety and morals are not at risk. Some communities are more limited in the availability of programs for formal, non-formal and vocational skills training and education. The Assessment was also not able to uncover any programs that address occupational safety and worker health issues and training, and there was also a dire absence of programs to address the needs of children who become partially or permanently disabled due to work-related accidents, injuries, or illnesses.

B. Household Variables Affecting Child labor and Education

- The data show large, extended families (approximately 9 people per household) headed by adults with low levels of literacy, with at least half of all household heads being women. Most families are Christian subsistence farmers.
- 4.5 percent of households surveyed are headed by youth under 18 years old.
- A majority of children after age 5 are working and making financial contributions to their households, with the percentage increasing as children get older. The majority of children in the households we surveyed (88%) reported that they were working to help support their families, with nearly two thirds reporting doing work outside the household for their parents or others.
- The majority of working children in the households we contacted were working on behalf of their families, with more than 50 percent reporting doing work outside the household for their parents or others, as seen in the chart below.

Percent of Working Children 5 to 17 That Reported Working Outside the Household
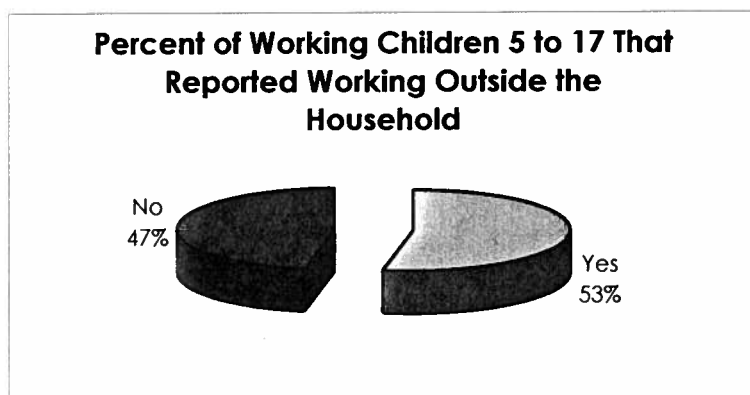
- A majority of heads of household do not know the term "child labor" and over 90% were unable to distinguish working conditions that were appropriate for adults yet harmful for children.

- Despite the large number of children in the households we surveyed, over three-fourths (76.7 percent) of children residing in the surveyed households did not have birth certificates or birth registration. The problem was particularly acute in rural areas.

- The lack of money for school expenses (school fees, school supplies, uniforms, lunch) was the by far the most commonly identified barrier to education. Of the children surveyed, 74.6 percent identified this as a barrier with a far fewer number of children identifying the other common barriers. These other barriers included: parent dead/ill/disabled (6.5 percent); recently moved/relocated (4.3 percent); and pregnancy (2.9 percent).

Most families value education as a way to escape their current plight, and know of the government's promise to provide free primary education to primary-school age children. But, many families are not able to keep their children in school due to economic pressures and the significant fees and costs associated with schooling. The lack of employment for adults, their inability to earn a livelihood and their too-frequent illnesses each contribute to their children/youth's engagement in work and exploitative child labor. They also are not familiar with the idea of "child labor" and discussion with parents and communities on the ways in which exploitative child labor can be detrimental would be useful.

C. Children's Education and Work Status

- The majority of children surveyed (64.4 percent) were enrolled in school, but over 70% entered school at a late age and 27% had repeated a grade. In addition, nearly a quarter (22 percent) of children reported missing at least one day in the prior week, showing that "enrolled" does not always mean "participating." [5]
- About a quarter of children were not currently in school, and an additional 11 percent had never been to school at all.
- Three-quarters of children and youth surveyed enter school late with 44 percent entering first grade between the ages 8 and 10 and 30 percent between the ages of 11 and 16.

Age Appropriate/On-time Enrollment in 1st Grade

Too Young (< 6 years) 10%

On-time (6 - 7 years) 16%

Late Enrolment (8 - 10 years) 44%

Very Late Enrollment (11 - 16 years) 30%
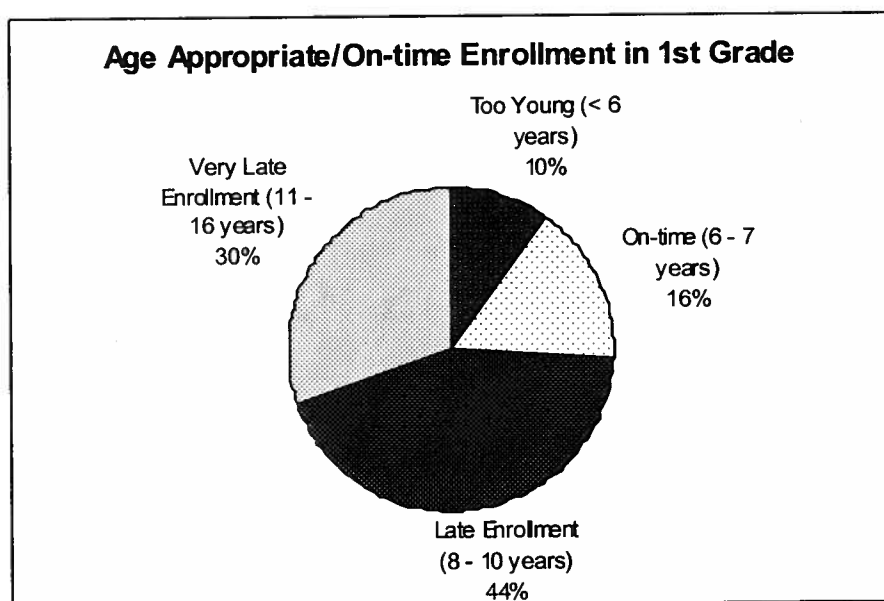
- Children are most likely to drop out after grade 2, at an average age of 10.8 years. Of the children surveyed, 19.2 percent had dropped out of school. Of these children who had dropped out, most (15.7 percent) had done so at age 14, followed by 10.2 percent at age 10 and 13 respectively.

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[5] There are several limitations to using primary enrollment rates as an indicator of exploitative child labor that should be kept in mind. Primary enrollment rates reflect the number of children who are enrolled during a given school year out of the total school-age population, but do not reflect the number of children actually attending school. Thus, a child can be enrolled in school, but never attend. As a result, primary enrollment rates often overstate the true number of children who attend school on a regular basis, and understate the number of children who may be working. In other cases, children who are enrolled in or attending school may also be engaged in work outside of school hours, also leading to an underestimate of children's work. Nevertheless, to the extent that child labor and education are linked, it is beneficial to examine any data that provide a measure of children's access to and participation in schooling, particularly in rural and impoverished areas.

- More than half of all children surveyed are engaged in exploitative child labor. Of these, 57.8 percent were engaged in dangerous or inappropriate work,[6] 51.8 percent worked 25 or more hours, and 42.8 percent used dangerous tools. West Point and Tappita showed the highest incidence of exploitative child labor.

- A smaller number of children were found to have been involved in the military (1.2 percent) and in mining (1.2 percent). The Assessment also found a small number of girls engaged in prostitution (.3 percent), and children who were being forced to work (0.3%), or lived on the streets and worked to get food to eat to survive (0.3%). However, due to the sensitive nature of much of this information and the difficulty in getting this information through the Assessment methods these figures likely to significantly under-represent such cases.

- Children who are classified as engaging in exploitative child labor on the basis of hours worked are over twice as likely to be working excessive hours in their own household as outside of their home.

- Children who do not live with their parents are twice as likely to be in exploitative child labor as children who do, but no similar effect was seen for school enrollment.

- 14 percent of out-of-school children head their own households.

- Children who work are reporting working large numbers of hours per day, with many averaging 10 or more hours a day.

- Nearly a third (29 percent) of children who work reported getting injured, and these injuries have consequences on their work and school, sometimes even causing permanent bodily damage or disability.

- Almost half of children surveyed (45.6 percent) who work do so out of obligation to help family, friends and relatives, but others do so because they are forced to help pay off family debt (4.5 percent), assigned it by their school (4.5 percent), or must simply to pay for food and shelter because they are the child-head of household or homeless (7.6 percent).

Many students are enrolled in school but need assistance to avoid dropping out, as most have risk factors such as being too old for their grade and working long hours at home even after school is over. Particular care needs to be paid to 10-, 13-, and 14-year-olds, and to those who are finishing second grade. Specific intervention strategies that target training for teachers and

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[6] Namely any work for people other than the child's parents or for parents outside the home that involves farming, domestic service, construction, mining, military, portering, manufacturing, rubber, timber, quarry work, sand digging, or casual labor. This work would be considered WFCL under C. 182 3d, work that is "hazardous to the health, safety, or morals of children."

supplemental syllabi that increase interest in staying in school will be helpful, as will targeting parents/guardians of these children and youth. Those who have dropped out need additional opportunities through vocational and other special programs. These can include education and skills training programs that closely link literacy and numeracy with functional vocational skills. Creation of work-study, work experience and on-the-job training with a literacy component, if appropriate, are advised. Because so much of Liberian child labor is performed in the home, a great deal of sensitization and public education will need to be done to help train parents to give their children the time and energy they need to focus on their studies. Part of this sensitization can include information about the Assessment findings that show so many children get hurt while working.

D. Assessment of the Education System and Infrastructure

- In Liberia as a whole, only an estimated 45 percent of schools are public; 31.5 are private, 11 percent are community-run, and 11.5 percent are mission run. The school year runs from September to June and has 2 semesters.
- In theory, free and compulsory education begins at age 6 and lasts six years. However, this is not the case. In the Assessment communities, total average costs for primary school are roughly equal to 5percent of family's annual income. Although costs varied significantly by community they ranged per fee from $300 to $4,000 Liberian dollars. The most common types of fees levied at schools were, in the following order, tuition, uniforms, tutoring, school fund, books, materials and supplies, and tests.
- Of the 126 schools and educational programs reviewed in the Assessment, 31 percent were preschools, 37.3 percent were primary schools, 27 percent were secondary schools, and a tiny percentage was vocation or adult literacy programs.
- Liberian children in the Assessment communities are dropping out of primary school at alarming rates, with only 8.3 percent of surveyed primary school students reaching grade 6.
- In general, Liberian schools are severely overcrowded, with 100 students or more in some primary classrooms.
- Approximately 80 percent of all schools assessed needed some infrastructure and facilities repair. Of these, 32 percent needed minor repairs to their school structure and most facilities were working, 36 percent need structural repairs and a portion of their facilities were not working, and 11 percent needed extensive reconstruction and basic

facilities were not working (most of these were in rural areas). 20 percent of schools assessed were in good condition with no repair needed to their structure of facilities.

- Major investments are needed in school facilities, such as security, desks/chairs, lighting, water, toilets, and food. Rural schools are in worse condition and have more dire needs. In 68.2 percent of schools studied, three or more children share a desk or bench; a third do not have toilets and of the toilets that are available, 81 percent do not offer a separate toilet for girls, which may serve as a disincentive for girls trying to attend classes; only 15.1 percent of schools surveyed offered free meals to students; Water is not available to students in 47.6 percent of the schools surveyed.
- Basic school supplies, especially textbooks and paper, are critically needed by schools.
- About half of teachers are not being paid in a timely manner, threatening school quality.
- A fifth of schools reported assigning physical labor as punishments for misbehavior, and half of children reported receiving beatings from teachers at school.

Most schools are under-equipped in many important ways, including space, teachers, water, textbooks, etc. Since the people we spoke to are very committed to maintaining the uniform requirements found at most schools, despite their large cost, providing uniforms for children might be an important and visible way to help families keep their children in school. Aside from capital improvements, schools seem to be most in need of teacher's guides, textbooks and other basic supplies. There is a need to remove other barriers to education by training teachers to use more child-centered teaching methods when possible and not to use corporal punishment or assign child labor as disciplinary practices. Training on how best to manage and teach large groups would also likely help teachers improve educational quality in the short-term until more spaces for children can be created and crowding alleviated.

III. Recommendations

A. Withdraw and prevent children from engaging in exploitative labor through direct educational services.

More than one-third of surveyed children were not in school, with 11 percent of these having never gone to school and three-quarters of children enrolling in school late. Half of all children surveyed were in the exploitative child labor, and upwards of 70 percent of the remaining children are at-risk. Only 6 percent of the households received any form of educational support. Of this, only 1 percent received tuition support, 2.8 percent books, 2.1 percent school supplies,

and none received vocation-specific materials directly. Additionally, we found that the cost to send a child to school can equal as much as 5 percent of a family's annual income, substantially higher if there is more than one child in school. Given the large size of families, the cost to send several children to school becomes a key factor in the decision of parents to prevent one or more children, particularly girls, from attending school and/or encouraging children to work to raise money to pay for some part of their schooling costs. As a result, assistance in the form of tuition vouchers, uniforms, books, school materials, and supplies will be needed.

- **Target areas with greatest need.**

  While all areas showed evidence of exploitative child labor and children at risk, some areas surfaced as having greater numbers than others and some contained the unconditional worst forms. Within the areas surveyed, West Point, Tappita, Gbapa, Karnplay, Chicken Soup and Foya (in that order) had the highest levels of exploitative child labor, and Chicken Soup and Tappita were highest with respect to children at risk.

- **Connect parents' desire to see their children educated with concrete means to keep them in school.**

  Meaningful aid in this area should include providing families with assistance for high-cost, high-visibility items such as uniforms and books. It should also mean offering opportunities for discussion and public education for parents and communities around children's need for time and energy in which to pursue their studies, as well as the dangerous of exploitative child labor to both children's health and their future.

- **Conduct proactive targeted outreach to identify key sectors of exploitative child labor, particularly focused on children at risk of being recruited for trafficking, soldiers, sex work (mainly girls), construction, mining, certain sectors of agriculture, and domestic servitude.**

  Urban slum areas in Monrovia were noted to have very young children in early marriage situations. West Point was also noted to have children who go missing and are suspected to have been abducted. Additionally, this area is noted to have children who have been raped as they walked to the latrines at school. Given the intense overcrowding and dire situation in this community, the level of assistance required is great. PHP was the site

where one youth was identified as having been soldiering in Cote d'Ivoire during the past year.

- **Create educational cost-sharing strategies for use with families in order to discourage dependency and promote retention in school or training programs.**

  While outside educational support is needed, it is important to not create reliance in the family on this support, since it will end at the closure of the program, or provide too little support such that the economic benefit has little inducement for the child to enter or stay in school. With the need to serve so many children and limited resources, creating cost-sharing strategies with families and providing the counseling needed to help families plan for future education costs is recommended.

  A cost-sharing strategy is an approach that considers support based on level of need, ability to pay, and compliance with the terms of the agreement, i.e., the child remains in school or training program and maintains good or passing grades. This approach encourages a dual role for parents and children working together to achieve the child's education. Parents will recognize the need to allow sufficient time for their child/ren to study after school, and the child will better recognize the opportunity and understand the consequences if they fail to do their part and study hard.

- **Expand children's and youth's awareness about prospective vocations and work opportunities relevant to local labor market demand.**

  When children and youth were queried during the assessment about their interest in learning a skill or trade, this met with a good measure of enthusiasm. When questioned about the subject, it was apparent that their level of awareness about vocations and possible jobs related to those that they had seen within the immediate local market. While some children could verbalize their interests, many struggled with a response. Initiating work exploration field trips to look at different jobs in the communities and talking to persons about what a typical day doing this job is like, would be very important in helping youth make key decisions before significant investments are made in training.

- **Develop supplemental educational materials for schools at targeted grades and age levels where highest numbers of children drop out.**

The creation of vocationally oriented educational materials that promote the value of education and its practical application in the world of work is needed. This will require that materials be developed with different orientations, i.e., urban and rural and be linked with relevant labor market realities in the targeted communities. This would include the use of functional vocational literacy materials within accelerated learning/ rapid primary education programs to promote relevancy as well.

- **Create partnerships with local vocational and skills training providers (where available) or local businesspersons for the combined delivery of services and training for beneficiaries needed, but ensure that it is a "quid pro quo" relationship.**

  Strong and lasting partnerships will need to be created or built upon to make this happen. While the availability of training service providers was evident in only Tappita, Karnplay, Voinjama, and CS, these were limited but had possibility for enhancement. However, a number of communities have no programs of this nature present. In all communities, it will be important to create or build partnerships with local business persons, not only for the provision of skills training, but also for securing needed for beneficiaries, such as tailors for making uniforms, shop owners for purchasing school supplies and materials, masons and carpenters for rehabilitating classrooms, school roofs, etc. When building these partnerships, it will be important to ensure that these relationships also become training sites for beneficiaries with a related vocational interest.

- **Coordinate and collaborate with the initiatives being sponsored by the ILO in Liberia focused on serving ex-combatant youth with vocational skills training.**

  Given the target of serving ex-combatants with skills training and the limited resources available, additional support may be garnered by a positive working relationship and collaboration.

- Further study in some areas is recommended.

  Red Light. Given that Red Light was the field test site of the survey instruments and for the training field researchers and due to the limited time, the research team was not able to

return to Red Light to conduct the formal assessment.

Freeport. This is an area that was not selected for study, but was observed as having exploitative child labor, The Freeport section of Monrovia is an urban commercial business site with some limited housing. However, the numbers of children observed working in this area based on brief observation suggest that large numbers of children are coming from other areas for employment. As a result, it is recommended that further assessment in this area be performed. Some of the types of exploitative child labor observed in this neighborhood include children working with scrap metal, portering heavy metal objects long distances, distributing pornographic materials among cars, and peddling items from wheel barrows along the road. All these activities were being performed by young children and youth during school hours.

Former Firestone Camps. Lastly, outside the Monrovia area, around the former Firestone housing camps, it was reported that large groups of former ex-combatants are grouped. While this area was not targeted for study due to high security concerns, efforts need to be undertaken to study the situation of children and youth that reside there and determine the level of exploitative child labor that exists and their educational needs.

- **Remain vigilant to ensure that program strategies do not have unintended effects.**

As we noted earlier, programs designed to alleviate poverty can sometimes have unintended results. For example, the planned economic revitalization of the Chicken Soup area might both push poorer residents out to other areas while simultaneously creating demand for additional services. Another area of concern relates how eligibility is applied for program participation. Limiting services to just children engaged in exploitative child labor could have the unintended effect of encouraging children and youth to engage in these activities just so that they would qualify for the program service. Ensuring that both sectors of children are available for services, while providing improvements in schools that benefit all children and youth, will help to limit the potential for this problem. However, vigilance will be needed to monitor this situation carefully.

B. Improve the quality of educational services and school infrastructure

While the availability and basic structures of schools in Liberia are somewhat better than schools found in Sierra Leone, a great deal of additional support is needed. Overcrowding in the classrooms and very high student-to-teacher ratios mean that often the teachers are doing nothing more than crowd management as opposed to real instruction. Teachers in many communities, while very committed, are quite demotivated. The overall reported absenteeism rate of teachers is low, which is good. However, with the high student-to-teacher ratios, the absenteeism of even one or two teachers can be considerably disruptive for other teachers and students. We should note that the reliability of actual teacher absenteeism rates is often difficult to ascertain due to the lack of use of attendance records, not only for teachers but for students as well. Additionally, some head teachers' lack of use of available school registers and their inability to describe accurately how to calculate attendance rates of students is quite troubling.

Additionally, most troubling is the atmosphere within which children experience education. While many children reporting positive learning and learner-centered approaches to education, they also reported experiencing or observing beatings, verbal abuse, and/or harassment. Schools assigning work as punishment and the incident of accidents and injuries to the students while teaching about child rights and child labor will be confusing and sending mixed messages to students.

- **Training with teachers in multiple areas is recommended.**

    It will be important to ensure that training targets key areas of problems identified through the assessment, but also allows for head and classroom teachers to have input by adding additional subjects as well. Some possible areas of teacher training may include, but is not limited to, the following:
    - How to effectively use the Teachers' Guide when teaching the national syllabus.
    - How to effectively teach without textbooks.
    - Learner-centered teaching pedagogy and methods.
    - How to teach large numbers of students effectively.
    - Incorporating relevancy into the curriculum, including the production of low cost, supplemental teaching materials.
    - Managing the instruction of older youth in early primary grades.
    - Understanding exploitative child labor and child rights and how to teach students these concepts effectively.

- The "how" and "whys" of monitoring school attendance and absenteeism of students and teachers.
- Promoting a positive classroom environment for the students and teachers, i.e., effective approaches to discipline in the classroom.
- How to engage parents in the planning of life-long learning for their children and themselves.
- Building partnerships in the community for support of schools and teachers.
- Effective counseling of students with problems.
- Recognizing children at risk of dropping out and how to counsel with parents.

- **Incentives for teachers need to be tangible and considered adequate by teachers.**

Many of the teachers are under-paid and, when do they do get paid, it is not timely. This is most prominent in government-supported schools. Additionally, teachers are not receiving promised basic supplies, such as chalk, paper, etc., and have to purchase items themselves. As a result, some complain in the classroom with students, and others pass the cost on to parents through the creation of school funds that serve to increase the cost of education. Working with teachers to garner ideas about provision of non-monetary incentives and learning supplies is encouraged. The most prominent suggestions received during the assessment were the building of housing and provision of transportation assistance for teachers to get to the schools that are located far away from their homes. Whether these would be considered cash incentives may be debatable.

Training may be a motivating incentive, as long as classroom teachers—not just the head teacher—are able to attend. This could encourage teachers' willingness to give up their free time for training at the local community level over a weekend or other time when teachers are available and not interfere with the instruction of students. Providing materials and other supplies that teachers can later use to implement learned training strategies could also serve as an added incentive. Further, when follow-up monitoring is conducted to determine if the teachers are applying what they have learned, further reward of non-cash incentives, such as additional supplies or teacher certificate or pin, would help to sustain the positive attitude about receiving a non-cash incentive.

- **Ensure that the types of vocational training provided are of interest to the youth, realistic for the communities, and do not over-saturate the local labor market.**

Examples of how NOT to operate vocational training programs were discussed by numerous community leaders in Lofa and Nimba counties. Apparently, in an effort to quickly provide ex-combatants with education and skills training as an alternative to fighting, little time had been taken to realistically consider the consequences when 60 auto mechanic graduates enter the labor market at the same time when there is a very limited supply of vehicles in operation in the area. This was further compounded when the financial support for the training and individual stipend support was terminated before graduation and job placement was achieved.

Careful planning that combines consideration about the vocational interest and aptitude of youth, the availability of realistic jobs and/or local market to sustain employment, and the approach to delivering such training on an individual or group basis needs to be considered. One of the biggest mistakes when setting up training programs is failing to consider how the program will be able to sustain itself and adjust to changes in the local labor market after the initial financial investments are made. Often, due to the large investment in creating such training, buying the necessary equipment and tools, and securing a reliable and qualified trainer, it is hard to eventually close down the training and shift to other more viable training options due to the new investment costs required.

Consideration needs to be given as to how these training programs will be sustained and further training opportunities will continue once donor funding concludes. Promoting work/study, on-the-job training, work experience and other more individualized skills training options may be more viable in the long-term, as these can be continued and sustained by the individual trainers and local businesses after the program concludes, particularly if the programs are developed with the strategy of sustainability in mind.

- **Labor market assessments should be relevant to rural agricultural nature of communities and limited infrastructure.**

Many of the communities, particularly up-country, have limited infrastructure and depend on periodic generator power for electrical needs. As a result, the creation of

certain types of skills training may not be feasible, until electricity becomes more widespread. As a result, labor market assessments will need to be flexible enough to monitor and project changes in the market so that the skills training provided keeps pace with the local labor market demand.

- **Target limited rehabilitation resources where the greatest impact can be made.**

Post-conflict recovery in Liberia appears to have had a greater emphasis on the rebuilding of schools and making improvements to the availability of services at the site, such as establishing protected wells and separate toilets for students, than similar efforts some years ago in Sierra Leone. However, significant work is still needed to ensure that schools are able to absorb additional students, that classrooms are less crowded, and that there is sufficient lighting for students to read, write, and see the blackboard.

The Assessment found schools in all areas surveyed to have insufficient lighting in the classrooms, while one school having no roof was determined to have excessive lighting. With over 93 percent of schools having problems, an intervention strategy that places natural lighting in strategic locations in the roof with plastic "skylights" may be the more cost effective and less disruptive strategy. Many schools could benefit from this assistance.

The need for toilets, separate for girls, boys and teachers, is a very important for ensuring girls participation in school, especially older girls. While many schools have toilets, many of these were not separate. Some areas had schools with no toilets at all. These should be the priority areas, followed by schools with toilets not separate for girls. The areas where there are the highest percent without toilets are Gbapa, Karnplay, West Point, and Foya. One 9-year-old primary school student interviewed during the survey was raped by two adult males while walking from her school to the public toilets in West Point. In urban slum areas, such overcrowding and the lack of sanitation should be brought to the attention of government officials to take strategic actions to prevent such occurrences in the future.

- **Assist schools in meeting basic government quality standards when initiating their own school construction.**

Training should be provided with community leaders and school officials about understanding the basic requirements for schools to meet minimum government construction and other standards related to classroom size, student-to-classroom ratios, teacher-to-student ratios, etc.

- **Assist communities in establishing rapid primary education, accelerated learning, and vocational literacy programs.**

In our discussions with children and youth, it was clear that they wanted educations that would lead them to productive and meaningful work in the future. Especially for older and out-of-school youth, alternative education programs must be made available. Current availability of such programs is very limited in the communities we surveyed.

- **Caution is advised if programs plan to operate centralized training and then relocating graduates to other communities for job placement.**

While this strategy may be the only viable option for some very rural, remote areas, it should not be the preferred approach to delivering vocationally oriented skills training. The benefits and detriments to such an approach need to be given careful consideration. While a strategy of this nature may work well with adults and some older youth who have been functioning as adults, the majority of youth who are being removed from their family support structure will require considerable more investment of time and resources to address their personal, social, and developmental needs if retention and completion objectives are to be met.

C. Mobilize relevant stakeholders to increase knowledge and change attitudes about the value of education and the negative effects of child labor

At the time of the assessment, a new president in Liberia was just currently being sworn in and the cabinet members selected. This provides a real opportunity to work with the new government ministries to develop their strategy for addressing exploitative child labor and integrating this issue as a priority in several different areas of government. The problems within education are widespread, and these have decreased parents', children's, and youths' belief that education is worthwhile. Changing these attitudes will take time, but first steps are needed

to help parents, children, business, and government officials recognize the link that child labor has across many programs and political agendas.

In the targeted communities, IRC currently operates a gender-based violence program that promotes women and girls' rights and protection from violence, including prostitution and other exploitive forms of abuse. This program is operating in Chicken Soup, Voinjama, Saclepea and Karnplay communities. It was reported by civic and community leaders that in the past, some radio messages on children's rights sponsored by UNICEF were aired on the BBC and other regional and local cultural stations. Additionally, in Karnplay, one program was sponsoring education for child ex-combatants. Approximately 350+ youth, mostly boys, were currently enrolled into school. However, other than these initiatives, we found no community mobilization activities or education campaigns that were directly addressing the exploitative child labor in the targeted communities.

- **Work with appropriate government ministries to develop policies and strategies on education and the elimination of exploitative child labor, including ratification of all appropriate ILO conventions and international treaties and incorporating these protocols into the national legal structure.**

The objective is to raise the prominence of the child labor issue as a priority within Liberia's broader development agenda, such that it is addressed when policy makers consider poverty reduction, technology development, setting new laws and regulations, and promoting human rights. National and community ownership of the issue and strategies requires government ministry participation in CYCLE-sponsored training and strategy development activities at the national, county, and community levels. But the participation must be at a strategic level. Building the technical capacity, organizational skills, and good will of not only government but also NGO partners that will result in strategic planning to set the agenda for interventions long-term in Liberia is needed.

- **Promote the effective implementation and receptivity of these policies and strategies at the national, county, and community levels.**

Overstretched government ministries dealing with education, development, enforcement, and social welfare issues need help to understand and address child labor as part of their regular work and agenda of issues to be addressed. There is need for

effective political support, training of new government staff, and creating new opportunities for effective mobilization within relevant ministries. While implementing strategies at the national level, it will be important to mirror these same strategies at the county and community levels, and within the tribal systems that exist. Building a national coalition of NGO and INGO partners with similar objectives that impact education and the lives of children is needed. It will be critical, to the degree appropriate, to assist the National Commission on Child Labor in setting its annual agenda, clarifying roles of various ministry and other partners, and targeting strategic but obtainable objectives to help to set the direction for the future.

- **Use strategic approach to community mobilization activities around child labor, child rights and education.**

The SCREAM (Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts, and the Media) program, produced and available through the ILO, is a multi-media program containing 14 modules with prepared text and material ideas that have been found to be effective. The SCREAM materials have been found to be especially helpful to teachers for incorporating child labor into the teachings in the classroom and with youth groups for the presentation of dramas, art and music to bring key child labor prevention messages to the broader community. The materials are available in English and 13 other languages. However, it is unlikely that these languages would cover those spoken within the target communities. As a result, it may be advisable to have the materials translated into local languages for airing on local cultural stations or use by local community members or NGO partners. When using radio, local cultural stations appear to have the widest listenership among teachers, adults, and civic and community leaders. However, when targeting children, the more youth-oriented stations out of Monrovia would be appropriate.

Use of local musicians and artists can help to enhance and adapt materials so that they are culturally appropriate for the targeted communities. It may be advisable that the materials, such as posters and radio spots, be centrally produced at the national level for cost- effectiveness and to ensure that the core messages are uniformly presented in a logical, coordinated, and timely fashion. However, this should not discourage creativity in the production of additional materials at the local levels. Teachers and youth groups have been extremely effective and creative in producing materials that are attractive

and appropriate for related target audiences.

- **Implement a Liberia Day Against Child Labor.**

  As part of a social mobilization campaign, consideration should be given to sponsoring an annual Liberia Day Against Child Labor that corresponds with the ILO's worldwide initiative on World Day Against Child Labor. Aid Organizations can collaborate with government, ILO, UNICEF and other partners to jointly plan and initiative activities throughout the targeted communities in a coordinated strategic campaign.

- **Utilizing approaches that include techniques, such as social marketing and strategic targeting of certain types of exploitative child labor that exist in the local community is encouraged.**

  These community-wide campaigns should be coordinated and done in tandem with the community-level social mobilization activities in order to achieve the greatest impact.

- **Develop knowledge base of information and share the results of the needs and resource assessment with appropriate government, civic, and community representatives.**

  We received repeated requests from community leaders and teachers for feedback on the results of the assessment. Following through in this area can help to ensure that the local community is engaged in the planning of local programmatic implementation strategies. This approach can help to ensure ownership of the strategies, foster awareness, and create additional opportunities to garner community support.

D. Link and strengthen systems for monitoring educational achievement and working status of target children in implementation areas

The assessment determined that no real systems for monitoring, enforcement, or evaluating outcomes were currently in place. However, with the new government, this presents an ideal opportunity for advocacy to ensure that these issues, when considered, will include child labor issues. Counting the number of children through birth registration and using the most recent census data will be essential to planning future educational budgets, locations for school

construction, and placement of teachers. Again, overstretched systems and the problems associated with corruption can impede efforts to ensure that needed services reach children of greatest need.

- **Work with government to advocate for birth registration of children.**

   Evident from the assessment is the absence of many of the systems or tools that a government needs for planning and monitoring. Having reliable numbers to plan for the design and delivery of educational services for the future is critical to meeting compulsory education goals and objectives, reducing overcrowding in the classroom, ensuring that schools are built in appropriate locations, and that teachers are appropriately assigned so that minimum students to teacher ratios are achievable. All of these strategies for improving the quality of education are linked with having adequate information in advance and having teachers and communities know how to plan for the future. Training to assist head teachers, school management, and monitoring committees to understand and use this information is a role that aid organizations can play.

- **Work in collaboration with government and local community members and partners, especially youth groups, to monitor the activities of children in terms of school participation and work. Programs should support the establishment of such youth groups where they do not exist.**

   Part of education, enforcement, and systems for evaluating effectiveness is the establishment of data-gathering mechanisms that can provide reliable information on the activities of children and youth and their participation in school. Establishing a role for literate youth in the delivery of such monitoring and referral activities can have a very positive long-term impact. Models like those conducted by the MV Foundation in India, may have positive applications in Liberia as well.

IV. APPENDIX - Legal Framework for Child Labor and Education

While international laws and treaties can seem very remote to communities, they do have an impact on a country's own laws and regulations and on creating a climate that is favorable or unfavorable to children, so it is important to understand this larger context. In this section, we will outline the international laws that apply to child protection in Liberia.

A. Compliance with International Protections for Children

There are several international protections designed to keep children from being exploited in the work force. These include the International Labor Organization's Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999), Convention 138 on the Minimum Age of Work (1973), the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international protocols and treaties.

1. ILO Conventions 182 and 138

ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor directs signatory nations to protect children by:

- enacting national laws defining worst forms of child labor and identifying where these types of work exist (Article 4);
- monitoring worst forms of child labor (Article 5);
- designing and implementing programs to eliminate worst forms of child labor (Article 6);
- providing necessary assistance for removal of children from worst forms of child labor, rehabilitation, and reintegration (Article 7);
- ensuring access to free basic education, and, wherever possible and appropriate, vocational education, for all children removed from worst forms of child labor (Article 7); and
- taking into account the special situation of girls (Article 7).

ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Work also provides additional direction to nations to "ensure the effective abolition of child labor and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons." Additional provisions specify:

- that children should not begin work before the end of their compulsory education or, in less developed nations, before the age of 14. For more hazardous work, the convention says 18 is the minimum age.
- that the convention applies to "mining and quarrying; manufacturing; construction; electricity, gas and water; sanitary services; transport, storage and communication; and plantations and other commercial agricultural undertakings," but do exclude family and small-scale farms "producing for local consumption and not regularly employing hired workers."
- that national laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age in "light work" that is "not likely to be harmful to their health or development" or "prejudice their attendance at school...or their participation in vocational orientation or training programs" Oddly, the convention also says that "national laws or regulations may also permit the employment or work of persons who are at least 15 years of age but have not yet completed their compulsory schooling."

Liberia has not yet ratified ILO Convention 138 but did ratify Convention 182 in 2003. We are told, however, by our in-country staff that the convention still needs to be incorporated into the country's domestic legal structure.

2. U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child
The United Nations developed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, and Liberia ratified it the same year. Its key features include the following:
- "In all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." (Article 3)
- "States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." (Article 6)
- Children should be registered immediately after birth, and have the right to a name and nationality. (Article 7)
- Children should not be separated from their parents against their will, except when competent authorities deem it to be in the best interest of the child. (Article 9)
- State Parties shall take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad. (Article 11)
- "State Parties should take measures to protect the child from all forms of "physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse." (Article 19)

- States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and shall make primary education compulsory and available free to all. (Article 28)
- "States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development." (Article 32)
- States Parties should protect children from sexual exploitation, abduction, trafficking and torture, and no child should be deprived of his or her liberty (Articles 34-37)
- The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRCOPSC), which requires separate ratification, prohibits the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography.
- "States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 do not take a direct part in hostilities." (Article 38)
- The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRCOPAC), which requires separate ratification, raises the minimum age to 18.
- States Parties shall promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of exploitation, abuse, etc... (Article 39)

In addition, CRC establishes a Committee on the Rights of the Child, which includes 10 members elected by States Parties to four-year terms. State Parties are also required to submit to the Committee reports on the measures they have adopted and their progress every five years. The Committee may then make suggestions and general recommendations based on the information received.

3. Additional International Involvement

Because of the long civil war (1989-1995, 2000-2003) and ongoing unrest in Liberia, the United Nations has had a history of involvement in Liberia. There was a U.N. Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) active from 1993 through 1997, and in 2003, a peacekeeping mission of 15,000 military personnel and 1,000 civilian police officers was approved (UNMIL). UNMIL's mandate calls for the "implementation of a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) programme for all armed parties; with particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women." Such programs typically include coordinating with NGOs for vocational training, education, and other rehabilitation programs for ex-combatants and war-affected children.

4. Regional Treaties

In addition to these international conventions, there are two African regional treaties related to child labor and education that Liberia has not yet ratified. The first is the 1981 African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which guarantees both "equitable and satisfactory" work conditions (Article 15), and the universal right of all individuals to an education (Article 17.1). The second is the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which obliges signatory states to prohibit the use of children in armed conflict, to "take all appropriate measures" to achieve free and compulsory basic education (Article 11.1), and ensure freedom from economic exploitation and work that hinders or harms her development in any way (Article 15.1). Unfortunately, the CYCLE program must operate in a legal context in Liberia in which these and several of the additional international protections for children have not yet been ratified or put into the force of law.

B. Child Labor and Education-Related National Laws and Regulations

The Liberian legal system is very similar to the U.S. system of law, but the war has caused a complete breakdown of the legal structure. Case law that was decided wasn't recorded from 1980 to 2003, except for decisions of the Supreme Court, but a great deal of that was not coded. There has been some change since the war, but none relates to child labor or education.

Most recent laws are from 1978, meaning that most of the laws were on the books prior to the conflict, and they may need to be updated post-conflict to include changes needed from the ratification of international treaties. Until the Constitution is changed or laws are rewritten, the older laws are still the laws in place and in force. Enforcement mechanisms are not strong as yet and will need to be further addressed.

While many schools were severely damaged or destroyed in the fighting, the government has launched several initiatives aimed at improving education. These include the Assisted Enrollment Program, the Accelerated Learning Program, the National Mass Literacy Program, Girls in Distress Program, and the Special Needs Education Program.

1. Education-Related Laws and Regulations

Because the freed slaves who founded Liberia modeled its system of education on the American one, Liberia is said to have an educational system that "is distinctly different from that

in any other African country."[7] The unique aspects include a large percent of private and mission-run schools. However, with the conflict and changes in government, the legal system is in flux. In 1912, Liberia instituted 6 years of compulsory education for elementary children, passed a Universal Primary Education Law in 1974, and launched a Free and Compulsory Education Initiative in November 2005. The Education Act of 2001, which was passed in 2002, also provides free and compulsory education for children aged 6 through 11.

Liberia's April 4, 2004 response to the U.N. on its compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child notes that the Constitution must be amended to fully adopt the provisions of the CRC as well as ILO Convention 182. The same document also admits that despite the various efforts that have been made to improve the educational system in Liberia, "there has been no effective schooling for most children in Liberia as a result of general insecurity and mass displacement of people due to the civil war."[8]

2. Child Labor-Related Laws and Regulations
Liberia has laws on the books that, in theory, make it illegal to hire children under age 16, but there are exemptions that in practice allow children to work.

Under Title 18, Section 74 of the Labor Law, no employer may hire a child during hours when school is in session under the age of 16, if it interferes with their education. They can hire under 16 if they can show that the child is attending school regularly, is learning in school, and can legibly read and write simple sentences.

Title 18a, Section 500 of the same law states that minimum wages may not be set for "employees engaged in domestic or professional services, employees in undertakings with less than 4 employees, or employees in undertaking in which only family employees are employed." These provisions would exempt children working in family, small business, or domestic labor from receiving minimum wages. These same categories are also exempt from maximum hours provisions under Title 18a, Section 700, as are rubber-tree tappers and other agricultural workers whose work is defined by assigned tasks and not by hours.

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[7] See Liberia's Education entry at Brittanica.com for more information.
[8] See http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/replies/Liberia%20(English).pdf

Other relevant provisions of the Labor Law include Section 1506, which governs the recruitment of workers. No recruiter can recruit any worker under the age of 18, unless the occupation the government-approved for 16- to 18-year-olds, or if the child is "physically mature," then 16-year-olds can be recruited. Section 2600 also stipulates that owners of work camps must construct schools for children less than 15 years of age.

Additional laws include Labor Law 2:74, which govern schooling and employment of children, and Penal Law sections 18:4 and 18:9, which cover prostitution and loitering.

Of special note is the age gap created between compulsory education laws, which in theory cover a child through age 11, and the minimum age in employment laws of 16. Children between these ages may be more vulnerable to wanting to work and of entering in exploitive child labor.